

SCHAUMBURG, IL— Today, U.S. Representative Melissa Bean joined Congressmen Rahm Emanuel (D-IL), Bart Stupak (D-MI), Janice Schakowsky (D-IL), Vernon Ehlers (R-MI), Mark Green (R-WI), John McHugh (R-NY), and Louise Slaughter (D-NY) at a press conference to call on the House of Representatives to ban oil and gas drilling in and under the Great Lakes. On Tuesday, the rules committee struck down the members' amendment to the Energy Bill. The members now plan to introduce a standalone bill to protect the Great Lakes later this month. That bill is also expected to garner bipartisan support, including that of Congressman Mark Steven Kirk (R-IL) who has previously supported similar legislation.

"Lake Michigan is the primary source of fresh drinking water for residents of Illinois' Eighth District," Bean said, "so the cleanliness of Lake Michigan is one of my highest priorities. Given the continued and growing demand on the Great Lakes as a resource for drinking water, commerce, and recreation, it is essential that we protect them from irreversible damage and dangerous contamination. A permanent ban on new drilling will help do that."

The effects of drilling, which range from harmful byproducts to chemical accumulation in the food chain, can have substantial undesirable effects on the lakes' overall water quality.

For the past 30 years, state and local governments in Great Lakes states have worked with their own citizens and the federal government to reverse years of damage to the Great Lakes. They have made tremendous progress, improving the quality of the Lakes while encouraging commerce and the economic vitality of the region.

The Great Lakes represent 95 percent of the United States' surface freshwater and provide drinking water for more than 30 million Americans. In 2002, Congress initially protected the Lakes by banning oil and gas drilling there, but this ban is set to expire in 2007. Congress is currently considering a comprehensive energy bill, which – in its current form – would open the door to oil and gas drilling in the Great Lakes.

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